

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
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(202) 461-7600
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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will host a national conference on homelessness among veterans Sept. 28-30, at the Holiday Inn Inner Harbor in Baltimore. The conference is open to the public and will include private sector groups and individuals involved in helping veterans and other homeless persons. It will focus on creating new partnerships, strengthening existing ones among those who provide care and assistance to homeless veterans, and on improving the continuum of care within VA's health care delivery system.

"Great efforts are required of existing VA health care and benefit programs, as well as partnerships among public and private caregivers, to assist homeless veterans throughout the country. We cannot rest as long as there is homelessness among our veteran population," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr. "This conference represents our continuing commitment to break the cycle of homelessness among veterans and will help us fine-tune the VA blueprint developed in the first national summit on homelessness among veterans four years ago in Washington, D.C."

The theme for the three-day conference is "Our Mission -- Medical Care and Support for Homeless Veterans." Conference activities will include panel discussions and workshops aimed at providing or sharing information on housing, service and advocacy strategies, coalition building, employment, education, special needs and health care for homeless veterans.

Participants and speakers will include representatives of VA, public and private groups, state and local departments of veterans affairs, national and local chapters of veterans service organizations, national homeless organizations, and other federal agencies.

VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless veterans and currently directs several billion dollars from its regular or mainstream programs to assist hundreds of thousands of homeless and at-risk veterans. The department directed more than \$90 million in fiscal year 1998 to its specialized homeless assistance programs and has made 101 awards in the past four years through its grants and per diem program to public and private nonprofit groups to develop new programs to assist homeless veterans.